Clatsop County Historical Society Quarterly

CUMTUX

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Image courtesy of Jim Aalberg

An aerial view of the community of Westport, Oregon and the westerly portion of the Westport Slough. September 25, 1954

In This Issue . . .

How many rivers in Clatsop County can you name? That might not be too hard. —Now, how many slough can you name? Most of the rivers have a Native American origin, but where did the names of the sloughs come from? Jim Aalberg searched records, old and new, for the answers. These he presents in the first story in this issue along with their locations. Jim encountered many inconsistencies on the maps he studied and is asking help to make sense of them.

Dea Canary writes about her close encounter with wild animals on the Heckard Slough.

Thomas Smith writes about the history of a house in Surf Pines he once owned that the rest of us can only dream about. For some of the residents, this grand house seemed to be alive with malignant spirits that turned the dreams into nightmares. Tom hopes that there will be more stories will appear in *Cumtux* about this part of the county.

The last story is the final installment of the first section of the book by John E. Seeborg, "A Finn From Astoria." The complete book is here in the Archives and is available for members and visitors to read. We are grateful to John's nephew, Larry Seeborg, for making us aware of this book and his help in printing the stories.

—The Editor

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Image of Wayne Saiget looking at bamboo poles used on troller fishing boats. Photo by Allen Saiget, ca. 1942

CCHS Image #21.001.056.009

CUMTUX: Chinook jargon:
"To know…to inform"

A Slew of Sloughs
The Marshy Inlets Of Clatsop County

By Jim Aalberg

Slough \ 'slü (noun) from Middle High German slouche, meaning a ditch:

1. an area of soft, muddy ground
2. a swamp or swamp-like region
3. a hole full of mire, like one that can form in a road
4. a condition of degradation, despair, or helplessness

- **In the Northwest:** a sluggish side channel of a river
- **On the Pacific Coast:** a marshy saltwater inlet
- **In the Prairies:** a large hole where water collects or the water in such a hole.

As for the noun "slew," it is an American colloquialism from the early 19th century. Its origins are unclear, but perhaps it is taken from the Irish-Gaelic "sluagh," meaning "multitude." "Slew" has several homographs; as a verb, "slew" is the past tense of "slay": "slew" as a spelling variant of "slough." The verb "slew" has a meaning "to turn, veer, or skid." Of course, in my title, I am going with "multitude." Best to leave further discussion to the etymologist and move on to the story of the sloughs of Clatsop County.

The sloughs of the Lower Columbia River are like throbbing veins webbing out from the primary artery of the mighty river, pulsating with the ebbing tides of the Pacific. As one can see from topographical maps, it is often difficult to determine where a slough begins and ends, some merging and uniting with adjacent sloughs, rivers, and creeks. Throughout the years, these inlets have offered a safe harbor for boats, served as points of distribution for goods, and served as part of the extensive water highways of the Lower Columbia. Even though their importance to coastal life and commerce is well documented, it seems that not every slough of Clatsop County has been honored with a name. So, for the intrepid explorer, naming rights appear to still be available for some of these orphan sluggish side channels.

These sloughs' ecosystems offer wonderful outdoor adventures, including kayaking, hiking, fishing, waterfowl hunting, wildlife viewing, and beautiful fauna.

A Highway for Logs

The dumping, booming, and rafting of logs occurred on many of the region's tidal sloughs to supply regional sawmills. Many of these sloughs are affected by the tides and are considered tidal waters. For generations, they were used to facilitate

the dumping and movement of logs. Tidal gates were constructed and installed to maximize the sloughs' draft and width in those specifically used for transporting logs.

The use of these "tidal waters" for log transportation resulted in various legal actions. The Oregon State Supreme Court ruled in 1890 that the portion above the Mean High Tide was not a navigable waterway, which meant no dredging or widening of small streams or gully areas that could have been used to feed logs into these tidewater sloughs. Also, other legal battles arose around the driving of pilings into these waterways to construct log booms if it prevented a landowner from using the slough or creek for navigation.

Several major legal battles involving the transporting of logs centered on what defined a "navigable waterway" that these loggers could use. Farmers along these sloughs continued to bring suits, and the Oregon Supreme Court heard several.

These sloughs were diked, filled, dammed, blocked, and modified to claim back tideland for pastures, farming, or to accommodate the movement of logs.

Many of these sloughs also acted as a means for traveling to school, moving farming production and mail, visiting the mercantile, and, of course, served as waterways to and from the major water highway, the Columbia. Many of the larger sloughs also met the requirements to safely harbor boats and accommodate wharves and docks off the Columbia's main shipping channel.

From historical and current maps and various articles and directories, I found the following named sloughs in Clatsop County starting upriver in the east then west to the Pacific.

Sloughs Neighboring the Columbia River

The county's most "prominent" slough systems are likely the Westport and Blind sloughs. This is based on the history of commercial development along these sloughs and their navigational usage going back to the 1860s. However, all the county sloughs have their own stories to tell, and each exhibits its unique topographic character.

Westport Slough

The slough's wide mouth meets the Columbia at River Mile 43 and then meanders more than ten miles eastward toward the community of Clatskanie. Before the late 1930s, it was navigable from its mouth to where it connected to the Clatskanie River in old town Clatskanie. It was a major migrating salmon route; this connection was plugged by a levee in 1936 and later topped with a county road as part of improvements authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1936. The Act was to provide flood protection to

boat ride upriver to Longview. He said the lumber mills there were hiring. A steamboat whistle blew just outside the cafe and, at George's urging, I cashed in my nickels and rushed aboard the boat with him. I paid the 75 cents fare to Longview and we were on our way. I believe the boat was a stern-wheeler named the *Georgianna*. We stopped at almost every dock between Astoria and Longview, dropping off and picking up freight, before reaching our destination late that afternoon. We checked in at a workmen's hotel called "The St. Helens Inn." My room was small, barely large enough for a cot, a table and a chair, but it was clean and cost a mere 50 cents a night. I spent two mornings canvassing the area mills and learned that my friend was in error. No jobs were available. In the evenings, I played some pinball machines, but never won more than a dollar or two at a time. My luck was running out.

After lunch on the second day, I decided to leave Longview. I learned that the fare on a city bus was a quarter, and the Longview bridge toll was also a quarter. So, in order to save a valuable 25 cents, I walked a long way to the bridge, paid the quarter to walk across only to learn that had I ridden the bus across the bridge, I would not have had to pay a bridge toll. In any event, the walk did me no harm. At the junction of Highway 30 in Rainier, I knew it was necessary to hitchhike, so I thumbed each car that passed, regardless of which direction it was going. In a few minutes, I was picked up and headed east. That made Portland my next destination. I reached Uncle Ed's home in Portland in time for Aunt Effie's dinner. I don't believe it had occurred to me until then that my parents probably had no idea what I was doing or where I was. Uncle Ed called my mother for me. That evening, I called Ruth, a girl I had met at a dance in Seaside, and she invited me over. It was another long walk but once at Ruth's home, the reward was delicious cake, coffee and a marvelous evening. We played her records and danced in the kitchen. Her parents went to a double feature movie, so it was almost midnight before they returned. Then came still another long walk, this time back to Uncle Ed's house.

My cousin, Johnny Reinikka, had a job in a lumber mill and he helped me try to find work in Portland, but it was the same old story. Unemployed married men with experience were also trying to find work. Uncle Ed gave me bus fare home.

How the Union "Helped""

My older brother, Eddie, left his job as a cereal chemist at the Pillsbury mill where he had worked for three years. He and Laura moved to Berkeley, California so he could attend the University of California. I

had applied for his job in the Astoria mill and the plant manager assured me the job was mine providing the labor union local gave its approval. The union had a "closed shop" agreement with Pillsbury, but I thought I had an inside track for the job. I felt confident that the union would approve my employment, partly because I was acquainted with the union secretary, Jack M., who was a close friend of my older brother, Hugo. But Jack scoffed at the idea of letting the mill employ a non-union man when some members of that local were still unemployed. I argued that none of those unemployed men wanted to become a cereal chemist but he said that was beside the point. I called on the Pillsbury mill manager one more time after I returned from Portland. He advised me again of the need to get union approval. I asked the union secretary one final time. Jack, speaking for the union, said, "No deal." It was like trying to find a bucket of steam.

Eddie's Visit to Gray School

There was a time, probably in 1931, when for some reason I was told to preside at a Gray School junior high assembly. The most important item on the agenda—at least to me—was big brother Eddie's visit to our school from the high school. The time came to introduce Eddie, and I undoubtedly tried to impress on the students how fortunate we were to have a visit from an alumnus who was such an important wheel at the high school. As Eddie advanced to the front of the auditorium, he modestly claimed that he was not deserving of such an introduction. Then he announced that his purpose in appearing was simply to promote some high school function to which we all were invited. My introduction lasted longer than his appearance.

Eddie's Collision Course

About ten years later, when he was employed as a cereal chemist at the Pillsbury mill and I was a postal letter carrier, he was involved in a baseball mishap. I got home from work and was greeted by Laura who was visibly upset. Eddie was sleeping in the bedroom at the head of the stairway as Laura and I went up the stairs to see him. Mother was in the room with him. Then I got the whole story: Eddie was in a baseball game at a Pillsbury picnic, playing in the outfield. He went running after a fly ball, only to collide head-on with a teammate chasing the same fly ball. When he recovered consciousness, he was brought home, apparently suffering from a concussion. He had a large bump on his head, and I'm sure he had a severe headache when he awoke. I had never known Eddie to play baseball before, and I'd wager he didn't play much afterwards.

Teenagers Visit Salem

In March of 1935, during the state basketball tournament in Salem, a friend of mine accompanied me in visiting my sister, Hannah, who was a patient in the state tuberculosis sanitarium. A couple of months earlier, Arvid had driven her from our home to the hospital for treatment of pleurisy, a disease very similar to tuberculosis. Her boss, Al Norblad, had considerable political clout, and had managed to get her admitted into the sanitarium for rest and treatment of her painful ailment.

She was delighted to see us, of course, but it was apparent that she was still ill. During our visit, she was abed in a large room open to the outdoors. Several other patients shared the room with her. She seemed to enjoy our talk about the tournament, particularly when we mentioned the players who were from our Church Hill neighborhood. Several months later she returned home, recovered.

A Tour of the Asylum

A few days later, we decided to visit the state hospital, better known to us kids as the insane asylum. There were three carloads of us Astoria kids in our group. We parked at the curb near where some trustees were tending the hospital lawn. As we unloaded onto the sidewalk, one of the trustee inmates called loudly, "Hello, Seeborg." Naturally, I took some ribbing, but I recognized the man as a former W. Franklin Street neighbor of ours on Church Hill. I also remembered the publicity he had received in the Astoria newspaper when he reported that a large swan had flown into a window of his home. That imagined report must have been the catalyst that resulted in his permanent confinement. Visiting the asylum was mindboggling. An attendant guided us around and let us see how inmates behaved in their mentally collapsed state, from some who merely stood motionless, staring into space, to others who spoke gibberish as they gestured animatedly to an imaginary audience. It was difficult to comprehend that a human mind could go so berserk.

Uniontown: A Mecca for Dedicated Drinkers

One morning, I returned home from a futile job-seeking effort (I was 18 then) and Mother was having coffee in the kitchen with a neighbor, a Mrs. J. I didn't want to intrude, so I stayed in the next room. The ladies' conversation turned to the problem of young men in Uniontown who were heavy drinkers. Mrs. Joki, whose two sons in their late 20's were reputedly leaders among the crowd of drinkers, made the comment, "I'm sure glad my boys don't drink—(pause)—except they drink so much water in the mornings." Exactly what drunks do when sobering up.

The commercial district of Uniontown included several taverns, all established in 1933 with the repeal of Prohibition. At first, "near beer" was the strongest legal alcoholic drink available. Its alcoholic content was limited to 4.2 percent. However, bootleg whiskey was available, and some customers who were ostensibly drinking beer in the taverns were suspected of having smuggled in whiskey. Drunks staggering out of taverns were not uncommon.

There was one man in particular who was an alcoholic and was seldom seen sober. His name was a Terho, pronounced "tare'-haw" (with a Finnish accent.) He was a harmless, happy go-lucky drunk who always seemed to be entering or leaving one of the taverns. At times, he would go behind the taverns on the north side of the street, find a brushy area and lie down for a nap. I don't know where he stayed on cold, rainy nights. Maybe he had a home.

West Point?

For a couple of weeks, I worked at the school helping Dad until finally we got another letter from Congressman Mott. That letter advised us that the next opportunity he had to appoint a West Point cadet would not occur until just before I reached the age limit and, if I failed then to beat the competition, I would not get another chance. He suggested I consider enlisting in the army and applying for a presidential appointment through an army West Point prep school. That way I could apply for one of several presidential appointments as well as become better qualified to try for the congressman's single appointment when it became available.

After a brief conference with Mother and Dad, I went to talk to an army recruiter. The army, I learned, had two bases, which had West Point prep schools, one in Texas, the other in Hawaii. I signed up for Hawaii and was on my way a day or two later. The date I left Astoria was October 8, 1936. There was no fanfare, nor any parties. Not even phone calls. The harsh reality that my financial situation would prevent me from going to college only strengthened my hopes of getting into West Point. A presidential or congressional appointment was my best chance.

This ends our three-part presentation of the boyhood recollections of John Seeborg. The rest of his story, plus the histories of many other Clatsop County residents, may be found in the archives of the Clatsop County Historical Society.

The Editor

Image courtesy of the Editor

fisherman's warehouse located on Gnat Creek near Blind Slough. Built by Union Cannery in 1928 with shares sold to the fishermen. There were fourteen shares with one share being held by the cannery. All shares presently are held by the Takalo and Westerholm families.